

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## THE QUESTION OF CAIN.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

### CHAPTER VI. HELEN'S LUCK.

As Helen Rhodes entered the big drawing-room, and with the slight curtsy of prescription presented herself before Miss Jerdane and the gentleman with whom she was talking, a quick look of surprise passed over the face of the latter. The girl's tall, lithe, graceful figure, her fair face with its singularly pure, grave, and harmonious lines, and expression of trustfulness and innocence without any touch of foolishness, her fresh sweet voice, as she addressed the few words, "Bessie told me to come to you," to Miss Jerdane, made an instant impression on Mr. Townley Gore. He had been for more than half an hour in conference with Miss Jerdane, and Helen had been the subject of their discourse, but nothing that was said had conveyed to him the idea that the daughter of his dead friend was a handsome and distinguished-looking girl. Miss Jerdane had spoken of Helen as "nice," and "good," and "intelligent," in an evenly commendatory tone which had given her hearer no distinct impression at all; and Mr. Townley Gore's general notion of school-girls was that they were lumpy, awkward, freckled, and giggling. He felt in an instant that when he introduced himself to Helen, as "an old friend of her father," any awkwardness which existed was on his side. A flush of colour suffused her face, but quickly faded; she placed her hand in that which Mr. Townley Gore extended to her, and said:

"You are very kind, sir. I did not know my father had a friend in England."

There was not the slightest intention of reproach or notion of sarcasm in Helen's mind, but the discreet Miss Jerdane—a faded, fair, thin-featured woman, with a kind anxious face—was disconcerted by her words. They seemed to charge this grand-looking gentleman, who meant so well by her unfortunate pupil, with neglect; and how would he take them? Excellently well, it seemed, for he said with a smile, as he released Helen's hand, and placed a chair for her:

"Nor did I know that my friend had a daughter in England. If I had known, I should have made acquaintance with you long ago. Miss Jerdane will tell you the circumstances that have brought me here, now, and that I come from your father."

"From my father!"

"Yes, my dear young lady. Your father left a letter in which he commended you to my care, and I have talked things over with Miss Jerdane. She will explain; and I need only say that I am very glad to be able to be of any use to my old friend's daughter, and that I hope all will go well. And now, Miss Jerdane, if you will excuse me, I think I must go. You will kindly let me hear from you according to your promise."

Miss Jerdane, who was not familiar with the happy faculty of men for escaping from an embarrassing position, and avoiding the doing of anything that they do not like to do, was not a little surprised by the precipitate retreat of Mr. Townley Gore. She had not the clue to the sudden change from the politely matter-of-fact gentleman who had enquired into the circumstances of Helen Rhodes's position, and discussed her prospects in the coolest possible manner, before he saw the girl, into the embarrassed

and almost emotional person who now took a hurried leave of herself and her astonished pupil.

"Miss Jerdane, what does it mean?"

"It means good news, my dear. You have great reason to be thankful to Providence: the painful uncertainty of your position is at an end."

"How?"

The slowness and primness of the good schoolmistress's speech—matters of inveterate habit—were, for the first time, extremely trying to Helen, whose heart was throbbing, and whose nerves were tingling; but she strove to subdue her emotion, lest Miss Jerdane should pause again to rebuke it.

"The gentleman whom you have just seen, my dear, is Mr. Townley Gore, and I understand from Messrs. Simpson and Rees that he is a person of excellent position and fortune; while he has himself informed me that your respected father and he were friends in their youth. Mr. Townley Gore proposes that you shall go and reside with Mrs. Townley Gore and himself when my establishment here is broken up, and undertakes the care and responsibility of your future. I congratulate you, my dear Helen; you are indeed a fortunate girl, and, as I had the satisfaction of assuring Mr. Townley Gore, I am certain you will deserve your good fortune."

Helen, pale and breathless, followed her slow, formal words. Some of them sounded oddly: the good fortune of an orphan girl among strangers! But she strove to resist that feeling, while trying to understand what had come to her.

"I don't quite know," she faltered; "am I to be—a—am I to belong to this lady and gentleman?"

"Belong to them? No; of course not! That is quite a foolish question, Helen. How can you belong to people who are not blood relations?"

"Then am I to be a governess there? or how is it to be?"

"You are certainly not to be a governess, because there are no children. You will just live with Mr. and Mrs. Townley Gore, and make yourself useful, I suppose. I should be very sorry to think that, after the years you have passed and the advantages you have had at the Hill House, you would find any difficulty in doing that. Their house is in Kaiser Crescent, a splendid mansion, no doubt, and you will have every comfort. I only hope you will always regulate your conduct

on the principles I have inculcated in your mind."

Why was it that the sudden light thrown upon the darkness of poor Helen's prospects did not cheer her? Why was it that the answer, so utterly unhelped for, to that grim question, "What was to become of her?" made so unexpectedly, did not bring with it the vast relief with which, an hour before, she had believed an answer to it must be hailed? Why did there come to her a sickening conviction that Miss Jerdane's satisfaction was largely due to getting rid of her own responsibility in a thoroughly final way; and also, just at the moment that her fortunes were taking an unlooked for turn for good, a terror of great loneliness and evil foreboding? Who can tell? It was so.

The next question Helen asked Mrs. Jerdane was apparently irrelevant.

"Is Mrs. Townley Gore ill?"

"Ill? No; not that I know of. Mr. Townley Gore said nothing about her health. Why?"

"Because—dear Miss Jerdane, don't be angry with me, don't think me ungrateful;" Helen wrung her slight fingers and looked piteously into Miss Jerdane's face; "I wonder she did not come to see me too. They are quite strangers, you know, and I am so lonely, and it is such a little time since papa died, and when you are gone away there will be no one. I am frightened; I confess that I am frightened. It is so strange, if these people mean to be kind to me, that the lady did not come too. And he stayed such a little while, I could not get to have the least feeling of knowing him."

In an outburst of feeling, most unusual to her, and of which Miss Jerdane had had no previous experience, not even when she told her of the death of Herbert Rhodes at Chundrapore, Helen sank on her knees, and hid her face in Miss Jerdane's lap, crying, with wild stormy sobs which strangely shook the composure of the school-mistress.

"This is very unreasonable," she said, affecting a sternness which she did not feel, for Helen's quick-witted perception of the flaw in the proceedings of the Townley Gores had touched what was womanly in her; "you really must not give way like this. Just consider—there now, sit down and dry your eyes, that's right—just consider the godsend this is. Your poor father had only five hundred pounds in the world to leave you; I am quite unable to

help you; peculiar circumstances have left you in a terribly unprotected position, and here are friends of your father's raised up, at the providential moment, to give you a home and protection."

"But to be quite dependent upon them; and they are strangers——"

"My dear," said Miss Jerdane severely, "you are really incomprehensible. The thing to be regarded with wonder is that strangers should offer you a home at all; that they should permit you to be dependent on them; believe me, this is a most uncommon case, however strong the tie of friendship between your father and Mr. Townley Gore may have been. There is a proverb, I don't use it in any offensive sense as you know well, which says, 'Beggars must not be choosers,' and only yesterday, I, at least, should have been very much puzzled to tell what was to become of you."

The very words she herself had used to Jane; the very form of the question that haunted and beset her. By a strong effort Helen controlled herself, and Miss Jerdane, with an approving glance at her, went on:

"It is very well, of course, for a girl to be able to make her own way in the world, but not by any means so well as to have it comfortably made or provided for her; and I am very thankful such is to be your case; for I shall always take a sincere interest in you."

Helen felt a slight shiver pass over her; "sincere interest" is little enough, when offered as the utmost that any human being has to give, to the hungry heart of seventeen; but she felt ever so much older than that, all of a sudden, and she thanked Miss Jerdane with composure which that lady regarded as reassuring and safe.

"And now," she said briskly, "that you are quite reasonable again, and determined to see things in their right light, I will tell you what your friend's wishes are. Mr. Townley Gore would have thought well of your remaining with me, had I been keeping on the school, but I explained to him at once that I was giving up everything here. You are to remain with me until just before I leave London, and I am to fix the day for your going to your new home."

"Am I not to see him? Will not Mrs. Townley Gore come to see me?"

"I do not know for certain, but I should say not. They are leaving town, he said, and he did not say anything about Mrs. Townley Gore's coming here. Now that I come to think of it, she may possibly be an

invalid, for when I mentioned to him that there was a sum in hand for your outfit for India, as it had fortunately not been bought, and asked whether I should take Mrs. Townley Gore's instructions about your wardrobe, he said: 'Certainly not, my dear madam. You are a far better judge than my wife of what will be requisite for Miss Rhodes.' That is not the case, you know; but I could not contradict Mr. Townley Gore."

"I shan't want anything," said Helen hurriedly; "I couldn't wear anything but deep mourning for a long time. May I have the money to take with me; the very last money my dear papa sent over for me? It is my very own, is it not?"

"Yes, my dear, it is your own; and the money sent to Messrs. Simpson and Rees for your passage out to India, that will be at your disposal too. And now, as I have other things to attend to, you may go and tell your news to your friend Jane. You will see how highly she will appreciate such good fortune."

Helen left the big drawing-room feeling thoroughly bewildered. Within little more than an hour two offers, solutions of the haunting question, "What was to become of her?" had been offered, but no freedom of choice between the two was left to her.

"And, oh, Jane," she said, when she had concluded her surprising narrative, "I wish—I wish it was to your aunt that I was going! She pitied me, and thought of me, and planned for me when she had never seen me, and you would have been there; but these grand fine people, this lady——"

"Helen!" said Jane gravely, her steady eyes searching the face before her with an anxious gaze; "this lady has never seen you either, and she too offers you a home."

"Yes; but how? I know it is wrong and foolish, but I feel afraid of Mrs. Townley Gore. If she had been a kind woman she would have come, or she would at least have sent some message to a poor girl like me. I would a thousand times rather be going to sew in your aunt's millinery rooms."

"You must not talk such nonsense as that," said Jane; "in the first place because the arrangement which has been made for you is what your father wished. That ought to be enough for you."

"Yes," said Helen despondently; "I know it ought, and that is one reason why I feel so unhappy, because it isn't. There's

something very bad in me, Jane, indeed there is."

"Probably; but it isn't that," said Jane, with the air of being ever so many years older than her hearer. "I don't wonder at your feeling that this thing might have been made pleasanter, but you must not dwell on that. You are going to be kept in your own position, you will not have to come down as we were saying a little while ago, you will have a friend with real power in Mr. Townley Gore, whatever the lady may be."

Much more of the same sort was said by Jane Merrick to Helen Rhodes, for Miss Jerdane had correctly calculated on the good sense and discretion of her elder pupil; and much too that was essentially girlish talk, for the one was not so sad nor the other so sensible but that they could stray into wondering about the Townley Gores, their house, their way of life, their "goings on" in general, and into speculating upon what Helen might have to do and might be expected to be. As the whole of this was mere speculation, entirely unaided by knowledge of any kind, it was unprofitable, except in so far as it tended to raise Helen's spirits.

We have seen that one of the fixed principles of Mrs. Townley Gore's conduct was never to quarrel with her husband. This rule was founded on calculation; she was entirely convinced that it would not "pay" to depart from it. But never, since she had set herself to abide by that rule, had she been so strongly tempted to break it, to indulge in vehement anger, merely because anger would be an indulgence, to burn a candle at the playing of a game not worth it, as she was when Mr. Townley Gore gave her an account of his visit to the Hill House. Mr. Townley Gore's manner was distinctly embarrassed. Her mode of receiving his first communication had been cleverly designed to embarrass him, and her air of polite but slightly bored indifference was not calculated to relieve him. They had dined alone. Mrs. Townley Gore was going out. She was brilliantly dressed, and looking very handsome. She was in good spirits, too. The business of pleasure for that night began with a concert at the house of a duchess, and Mrs. Townley Gore was to take with her the beautiful Miss Chevenix, whose singing had been quite a feature all through the season. Miss Chevenix was to sing for the duchess, and Mrs. Townley Gore was

so anxious that she should be in good voice, and found so much to say about it, that only by resolutely putting the subject aside did Mr. Townley Gore succeed in getting a hearing for himself. But then, with one quiet look at him, and one transient contraction of her dark level eyebrows, his wife prepared to listen, and stood on her guard. Leaning back in her chair, and pulling a gorgeous rose to pieces, while she slightly nodded when he made a pause and seemed to await a remark, she did not utter a word; but the rose-leaves were rent into very little shreds, and Mrs. Townley Gore's complexion required subduing by the powder-puff when the story had come to an end.

"Well, Caroline," said Mr. Townley Gore, after the pause of a full minute, "and what do you say to it all? You see, as the arrangement you proposed was impossible, I have done the next best thing, and I cannot help thinking you will admire and like the girl."

Without the slightest reference, either by word or look, to this remark, Mrs. Townley Gore put to her husband a point-blank question:

"How long do you intend Miss Rhodes to reside here?"

"How long? Well, I don't know. I didn't— In fact, I gave Miss Jerdane to understand that the arrangement might be permanent. I thought, under the circumstances, you know—and she really is so very presentable, so handsome, so distinguished. But," here Mr. Townley Gore looked at his wife with discouragement in every line of his face, and made an admission of weakness which she rated at its full value, "of course, Caroline, the matter must depend on circumstances. When the girl is here you will be able to decide on what is best to be done."

Mrs. Townley Gore was saved from having to reply by the announcement of the carriage.

"I don't think I blundered by telling her of the girl's beauty." So ran the thoughts of Mr. Townley Gore, as he indulged in some disconcerted musing before he applied himself to his own evening's amusements. "Her temper is not a sweet one, certainly, but she is not so little-minded as all that. However, it's no good bothering about it. I have done the best I could for the girl. She must only take her chance with Caroline."

And then Mr. Townley Gore made one more resolution in connection with the



subject. That resolution was that he would keep strictly to himself, with the sole exception of its inevitable participation by the business bosoms of Messrs. Simpson and Rees, the fact of the absolute pennilessness of Herbert Rhodes's daughter. The solicitors had told him of the failure of the Infallible Insurance Office; but he had said nothing of it to his wife or to Miss Jerdane. Under any circumstances, Helen should have five hundred pounds. To that extent, at any rate, the old debt should be paid, and no one, except, perhaps, his silent creditor in the other world, be the wiser.

### A PRACTICAL GARDENER

PROPER deference is due from amateurs to proficient in any profession, gardening as well as elsewhere. In gardening, too, wages are given for this deference—wages, or a very handsome *pour-boire*—which makes it very easy to give it; for rules can be laid down over the habits and requirements of plants, and fruits, and flowers, as unerring in their precision as the axioms of Euclid, after which, let the rules be but followed, and everyone will arrive at the foretold result, or demonstration. And as a very bright little gardening-book has just been published,\* which lays down these rules about as agreeably as they could be laid down, its pages are being turned over, that its agreeableness, as well as its good utility, may, in a general manner, and with brevity, be shown.

A novel plan has been pursued in the book. The well-known editor, being perfectly acquainted with the intricacies of the vegetable world, and with the fact that it is scarcely given to one man to have travelled all over it, to its efficient understanding everywhere, has mapped it out into twenty or thirty kingdoms, or departments; then he has put a governor, so to speak, over each; and he publishes the intelligence as sent in by each of these governors, the laws they have found good, their observations, their discoveries, their experiences. It is the precise method of popular magazines, in fact, where history is done by the historian, poetry by the poet, fiction by the fictionist, the padding (if all this is not revealing too much the secrets of successful serial compilation) by

the most skilled padder; and the editor of *The Practical Gardener*, having seized this magazine method, has attained the magazine attractive power also, for his illustrated volume might be taken up and pass muster as an "extra Christmas number," or an unusually smart "monthly."

Mr. Earley, for instance, speaks, out of his own especial domain, on window-gardening. Window-gardening, as no one needs reminding, is rapidly changing the aspect of town streets and town squares; is putting colour and freshness for vacancy and gloom; is working one of the cheeriest and most acceptable revolutions; and to learn how to make it effectual is of extreme importance. "Understand plants," says Mr. Earley; "understand their peculiarities, wants, needs, &c.; take a personal interest in them. Even weeds need especial sites, high and low, dry lands or marsh, to continue in health and vigour. Have proper learning, therefore, as to what those wants really are." It is excellent. And in accordance with the leading thought of it, Mr. Earley tells what plants will put up with low-lighted rooms and gas-burners, which want light, which want change of air, what soil should be used, what treatment administered, and so on. One of his good rules is that "frequent sponging or washing of the leaves is of very great advantage," and he adds that, as many of the bulbs he names "are moderate in price, they are not beyond the means of the ordinary mechanic, and the flowers of them will sweeten and brighten homes, large or small, affluent or humble."

Mr. J. C. Spyers speaks about the more expensive matter of orchids. "During the last ten years," he says, "no class of plants has more increased its number of lovers and growers than orchids. Scores of gentlemen now possess an excellent collection of cool, intermediate, and hot kinds;" in recognition of which Mr. Spyers takes the "four main points" necessary for beauty and propagation—"shading, ventilation, heating, and watering;" and he touches upon the evils of too much scorching and too much watering, with a clear precision which cannot fail to be of essential service. He mentions the beautiful *Disa grandiflora* and the *Maxillaria grandiflora*; also the large families of cattleyas and *lælias*, marking out the exact temperature to suit them, the exact water supply, and the rest. "Never let a phalænopsis or cypripedium get dry," he says; whilst of the cattleyas he says "the majority

\* Carters' *Practical Gardener: the Best Amateur's Guide*. Edited by E. J. Beale, F.L.S. Carter and Co., 237 and 238, High Holborn, London.

will not require watering oftener than every ten days," and that these various necessities, or, as the floricultural term is, "habits," should be known to the orchid-owner is not only of importance to his pocket, but to the frame of mind he is put into when he goes his morning rounds of his conservatories and glass-houses, and the key-note of his day's life is sounded. "Who enters here leaves hope behind" has other and lighter significances than that deep one it had to Dante; and when a flower-grower sees all his plants flourishing, sees their beauty, sees something still more beautiful to come from them in the future, he takes hope with him, and he feels the wholesome benefit of it.

There is an article on water-cress, too, in this Practical Gardener, by Mr. Shirley Hibberd. Grow water-cress, says this well-known expert. "It may be grown to perfection in any garden, and, with very little care, the supply may be kept up winter and summer." Moreover, it is added, very pithily: "While the family is benefited by the free enjoyment of a salutary salad, the production will prove a constant source of gratification to those engaged in it." And how may it be supposed this growing of water-cress is done? Simply, says Mr. Hibberd, "sow the seed on a rich moist border, as any other cress might be sown, and keep it freely supplied with water." As the little plants come up, and grow thick, they are ready for eating. They only want pulling alternately—that is, every other one, which is the best mode of thinning; and this leaves more room for more growth, allows of other alternate pulling, whenever required, all through many months, till the plants grow so large, only the heads are to be nipped out for the table, and severe frosts will bring the whole thing to an end. Surely, after such a clear exposition, such a proof of the uttermost simplicity, water-cress will be seen as frequently in gardens as parsley, mint, or other herbs better understood. There are strawberries, as another matter touching upon housekeeping, and therefore of double interest. Mr. E. Bennett is the authority chosen by the editor to make known what is best to be made known of this delicious fruit. He gives a list of twelve good varieties which he has found the best, and he records the remarkable fact that he has "succeeded in fruiting a variety named Garibaldi every month in the year, by the process of partial drying off, and starting the plants into growth at different inter-

vals." Melons most amateur gardeners are afraid to try; but in a sketch of melon-culture, by Mr. W. Crump, it does not seem as if there need be this fear. He points out a variety called the Blenheim Orange, stated by him to be of exquisite flavour, and very handsome in appearance, and that yet is of a hardy constitution, which he rightly says is of much importance to amateurs; so here again is an edible that might be much more frequently of home-growth than it ever has been. It is a question, however, whether melons will ever be an entirely favourite fruit in England. When the Englishman partakes of fruit in the slice, he likes it best with more solidity about it, as in the apple. To the foreigner this is not so. His climate gives him appetite for food of quite another kind. These remarks apply somewhat also to pines, treated in *The Practical Gardener* very effectively by Mr. W. Coleman, and to mushrooms; yet that a fruit or vegetable is not of ordinary acceptation, and therefore not of ordinary growth, is a reason all the more why amateurs who have a special reason for desiring their culture should consult a book for guidance, and it is well that the editor of this book took this into consideration.

In the grape, now, there are the identical qualities that English fruit-lovers demand. The vine is of universal adoption in this country, not only under glass, but wherever there is a wall to run its rods on, wherever there is sun to give the rich berry a chance to ripen; and Mr. J. Hunter attacks the subject from root to topmost leaf, leaving nothing unsaid. That many things are wanted for the successful life of a grape-house, everybody knows; and it is equally true that, owing to the acceptability of the fruit the grape-house produces, nobody minds the expense of these things, or the trouble of them, in the least. Looking down Mr. Hunter's code of instructions, the eye falls on such items as drainage, span-roofs, foundation-arches, concrete bottom, layers of broken bricks, of road-metal, of coarse gravel, piers, pipes, sand, clay, lime, charcoal—and more: all of it measured out and properly described. It may seem deterrent; but it is not so; every grape-house owner, whether his particular "fancy" be Black Hamburg, Madresfield Court, Duke of Buccleuch, Buckland Sweetwater, Foster's Seedling, Grizzly Frontignan, Golden Champion, Doctor Hogg, will give his "fancy" all the care recommended, and will be grateful to

the Practical Gardener for all the new hints he can get from it as to how to make his care and his subsequent triumph a great deal more. In truth is the grape the gardener's pet child, with the rare distinction, though, that it repays him honourably for every item of his petting.

How, though, of the article with the title, *A Year's Work under Glass*, by Mr. J. Sheppard, combining the vinery, the pinery, the orchard-house, the peach-house, and all pits and frames? It is most useful and comprehensive. "Decaying leaves anywhere," says this excellent authority, for one of his canons, "are sure to bring about damp; they should be picked off as soon as they begin to go, and the surface of the soil in the pots stirred occasionally, which, with a few fresh ashes added to the floor, will be found to arrest the spread of mouldy fungus, and have a very sweetening effect." The easy expedient of spreading newspapers over hothouse plants during frost, is recommended by Mr. Sheppard. Such slight night-gear, though thin, is just enough to "intercept the radiation of heat from below when so used, and will save many a treasure." There is much else of good advice that is very tempting to quote, but space is necessarily limited. There is a score more of other authorities on other subjects, of whom no word has yet been said, and—the pages must be turned. Mr. J. Douglas speaks of auriculas, of carnations, picotees, fuchsias, hyacinths. Who could know so well how to speak? "Many persons have a notion"—is his opening phrase—"that the auricula is a difficult plant to manage," and he proceeds to dispel this notion, showing how Alpine auriculas—called, prettily, Beatrice, Florence, Jessie, and so on—will do well out of doors. "The carnation and its more recent sister, the picotee," he says, "are placed amongst the old-fashioned flowers;" they are not to be despised on that account, though, he proceeds to intimate, and all flower-lovers must agree with him. Chrysanthemums find their historian, or, let it be put, their essayist, in Mr. E. Ottaway. The flower has a special interest, owing to its magnificent cultivation in the Temple Gardens; and Mr. Ottaway gives a lesson as to "the ease with which it is cultivated, even when surrounded by the smoky atmosphere of large cities, where other plants are a comparative failure."

The cineraria is treated by Mr. J. Westcott; the camellia, by "C. H. S.;" the azalea, by James Carter & Co.; the

herbaceous calceolaria, by "Prizeman;" the tuberous-rooted begonias by Mr. R. Keen; the gladiolus by the Rev. H. H. D'Ombrian; roses, by the Rev. Canon Hole; Lilies, the double tuberoses, the best bulbs, and annuals in pots, again by Messrs. Carter; and something new is said by each writer, and something to the point. Remembering the place they all occupy in floriculture, this "goes without saying," still attention must be called to the Rev. H. H. D'Ombrian's assurance that the splendid gladiolus may be grown in an ordinarily good garden soil; to the experience of the Rev. Canon Hole, on roses, covering five-and-thirty years, after which, he says, he has gone back to the plan with which he began—all detailed in his paper, admirably, and with his own humour; whilst "C. H. S.," on his especial subject of the camellia, is worthy of much commendation for the enthusiasm with which he insists that, "as camellias are grown out-of-doors in the south-western counties of England, in certain localities in Wales, in sheltered situations in some parts of Scotland and Ireland, they might be cultivated much more than they are everywhere, to the great profit as well as pleasure of the cultivator."

It is scarcely fair either to pass by *Kitchen Gardening*, by Mr. George Thomas Miles; by *Cottage Gardens*, by A Prize Essayist; by *The Fruit Garden*, as discoursed upon by Mr. A. Bridgman; by *Pleasure Grounds*, as planted by Mr. T. Coomber; by Mr. T. Baines's painstaking instructions about *The Conservatory and Greenhouse*; by *Fashionable Gardening*, its carpet-bedding and beautiful intermixtures of flowers and foliage, set down for the good teaching of all readers by so high an authority as Mr. A. Graham, of Hampton Court; but this short intimation of what has been done in these various and valuable departments is all that can be given, since again there is that inexorable necessity that the pages should be turned. The same fate is accorded to *Asparagus*, by Mr. W. Robinson; to *Tomatoes*, by Mr. W. Iggulden; to *Potatoes and Peas for Exhibition*, by Mr. A. Dean and Mr. J. Muir; to *Autumn Planting*, by Mr. Donald McDonald, with its pretty plate of the *Juniperus Virginiana alba spica*, a first-rate specimen-tree; to *Florists' Flowers*, by Mr. R. Dean, wherein he mentions that of late years a peculiar disease has affected the hollyhock. Exception must be made, however, to a capital paper called *Suburban Gardens*, by



Mr. J. Wright. This is likely to be the part of *The Practical Gardener* that will have the most frequent and the most diligent consultation. Mr. Wright has had a fortunate subject handed over to him for treatment by the editor, and he has entered into it with fortunate knowledge on all sides. "The suburban gardener," says Mr. Wright, "is a latter-day creation. He has sprung up with the growth of the modern just-a-little-way-out-of-town residence; he is for the most part a gentleman who spends his day in the City, and who looks forward with delight to the happy evening he shall have, while busying himself about the little plot of ground he is pleased to call his own." This is stating the case exactly. And it is precisely because gentlemen who spend their days in the City, or in the law-courts, or in chambers, and offices, and banks, and so on, at the West End, have this enjoyment of their gardens, and yet have not much knowledge of gardening to take this enjoyment to its best, that they require a competent guide to assist them, and will find themselves much interested in Mr. Wright's matter, and much in debt to him.

"The suburban gardener," says this practical essayist, very truly, "has many enemies of which the country amateur knows next to nothing;" then these enemies are enumerated, and the various antidotes prescribed. The various trees and shrubs for screening unsightly offices, unsightly neighbours, disillusionising peeps and overlookings of anything, have their claims to distinction duly noted; and it is told why conifers are best in one place, Lombardy poplars in another, and where it would be preferable to try the *Thuja lobbiana*, the *Cupressus Lawtoniana*, or *Cupressus macro carpa*. Pleasant hints about the rose acacia, the flowering almonds, the drooping laburnums, the guelder rose, the mountain ash, the mock orange, are not forgotten; so that it is perfectly easy to figure out a suburban garden as the lines run, and to see the obligation, arising out of Nature's own laws, for city suburbs—in their gardening—to show a strong family likeness. A garden-owner may wish for originality; he cannot attain to it; only certain things will grow in city-suburbs, and it only remains to be grateful to an index-finger that shows which way leads to decoration, and which is certain to end in failure.

In conclusion, the editor of this book under review shall himself be quoted. "It

is intended," he says, "to be a standard book of reference, embodying, as the work does, the results of the very latest improvements in gardening." And this capability of the progress in gardening must never be lost from the mind, and is the reason why gardeners have always something new to tell. "Systems like ours," says Thomas Mawe, gardener to the Duke of Leeds, writing his preface to *Every Man his Own Gardener*, in 1773, "can never be absolutely complete, owing to the many new discoveries which are daily making in the different parts of Europe, so we earnestly hope that those persons who are engaged in the cultivation of gardens will continue to oblige us with such discoveries as may occur in the progress of their employment, which we shall most thankfully receive, and gratefully acknowledge." To belong to an art, or a profession, that thus admits it can have expansion, that, in effect, asks for such expansion, instead of wrapping itself about as a perfected thing, a "mystery," is in itself a privilege; and it follows that no one can busy himself over half-a-score of plants on the sill of his window without becoming in all ways greatly benefited. Were it not for this, gardening, in its technical sense, would not be a subject for discussion in these columns.

## ON THE ROAD IN FRANCE.

### AT THE AUDIENCE.

It is not given to ordinary mortals to feast "*les rois*"\* with impunity. The fray follows the feast, a terrible fray according to Eugénie who brought back the news from her uncle's. She might have seen the whole affair indeed, for it happened at the café kept by her cousin, a widow very rich but not too amiable; yes, but for an unfortunate family quarrel Eugénie would probably have spent the day with her cousin, and thus witnessed everything. And the disturbance would have been something to see indeed. Windows had been broken, furniture smashed, the gendarmes had been called in, but when they came upon the scene the combat had ceased from the exhaustion of the combatants. But not before the frozen ground about had been stained with their blood. It was terrible, and all the doing of that wicked old fellow,

\* ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, Vol. 26, page 271, "On the Road in France: Adieu Noël."



the Père Marfieu, who had already been before justice more than once; but let him look out for himself, for the juge de paix had made up his mind to rid the country of him. Would the poor man then be sentenced to perpetual banishment? Well no, Eugénie thought, not quite that; but there were means—we should see.

With the prospect of an important cause to be tried, the *salle* of the juge de paix bade fair to be well filled. The court sat at eleven, and eleven was striking from the church tower; the notes vibrating clamorously over the heads of the market people in the square below, who chafe their hands and beat their *sabots* on the pavement while they grumble at the slackness of trade, everybody being cleaned out and penurious after the extravagance of the new year and *les rois*; eleven was striking when we left the market-place, and in the gloomy narrow street where Justice holds her seat, a little crowd had gathered on the steps of the court-house before the big outer doors, which were still closed. The wind howled searchingly up the street, but the people waited patiently and without murmurs—defendants for the most part, who were not in a hurry, might not have grieved, indeed, if told that the court would never open any more. Still there was a general movement of satisfaction when in the distance was seen a heavy portly man buttoning his coat and generally struggling into his garments. It was the greffier, Monsieur Buvot, registrar and clerk of the court, who will let us in.

"If he has not forgotten the key," suggested a bystander.

Buvot lives in the big rambling house round the corner, the house with the brass escutcheons over the door that bear the cabalistic inscription, "*Greffe*." There you may find him any day, when the court is not sitting or when he is not in the train of the juge de paix hurrying about the country on judicial affairs, in a little office stuffed full of old papers, ready to issue summonses and stamped paper in general. Over his desk hangs framed a certificate of his service as *sous officier*, with the dragons.

It was thus he established a claim to his quasi-judicial post, in which perhaps he fails to carry out a quite military exactitude and punctuality. And of military smartness there is hardly a trace in his burly form. Only if you saw him on *fêtes*, in his uniform of lieutenant of *sapeurs*

*pompiers*, with the brass helmet and nodding plumes, and girt with the clanking sabre, then perhaps you might detect in his bearing traces of the fire of other days. At the present day it is the fire of Madame Buvot that predominates, a brown and ardent woman of the south who has filled the big house with brown and dark-eyed children. It has very little else in the way of furniture.

By this time Buvot has found the key and unlocked the doors, and the crowd files in, into a bare whitewashed room, a portion of which is railed off with seats of deal disfigured with a single coat of yellow paint, a dais in the centre, and a table, with the judge's seat in the middle, and a chair at either end for greffier and commissary of police. A crucifix hangs over the judgment seat, the only ornament of the damp-stained walls, unless you reckon as such a framed tablet containing the fundamental laws of the state. Overhead looms a long black stove-pipe cunningly suspended by wires from the ceiling and disappearing abruptly through a hole in the wall without any regard to architectural appearances. In the stove are the materials for a fire recently lighted but now extinct. The greffier fumbles in his pocket for scraps of paper to rekindle it.

"If you would put my *procès* in there, Monsieur Buvot," suggests a cheerful defendant; at which there is a slight laugh, especially when Buvot makes a grimace expressive of his entire acquiescence personally in the proposal.

We all take more or less interest in the lighting of the fire, for it is a cold bleak morning and the room is like a vault. Chiefly active in the matter is a tall mild-looking countryman with features rather Irish than French, who zealously collects paper and unconsidered trifles from the floor, and even devotes some of the straw that lines his own *sabots* to feed the smouldering pile. An amiable fellow, almost too soft-hearted for his own interests you would say. Here Buvot whispers behind his hand, "It is Père Marfieu," winks, shakes his head, and vanishes.

While the fire is burning up we all cluster about it, talking eagerly and for the most part explaining the merits of our own particular *procès*, so that we hardly heed the arrival of some regular attendants of the court, who take their seats on the benches within the barrier. There is the retired juge de paix, frosted, wrinkled, and bowed by age, with white neck-cloth and

crimson rosette, who can no more keep away from the scene of his active life than the typical tallow-chandler on boiling days. With him, the former greffier, red-nosed and grubby, glad of little scraps of employment on the outskirts of the law, and the sallow propriétaire, muffled up to the eyes, who comes here to distract himself and improve his knowledge of the code, especially in its relations to the letting of houses and the privileges of landlords. And then to all the shuffling of feet, the creaking of benches, the general clatter of voices, succeeds a dead silence, as a huissier pops his head out of a side door, and first taking a comprehensive stage-manager's glance around, calls out sonorously, "Otez vos chapeaux."

Then the door is flung wide open, and a sturdy little man in a gown faced with black velvet, white bands, and a silver-laced beretta on his head, whisks forward with dignified haste, suggesting somehow the learned doctor from Padua. Buvot follows, a book under his arm, also in a gown and with a cap of the same pattern as the judge's beretta—like a circular sponge cake mould, that is, but without the silver lace—Buvot changed and glorified by the glow of judicial dignity about him. A man in everyday costume, with the edge of a tri-coloured scarf showing below his waistcoat, follows close upon the greffier's heels, and the procession is brought up by a huissier, gowned, but bareheaded. He in the tricolour is the commissary of police, who is here as public prosecutor. The judicial people seat themselves and uncover, and business begins.

First of all, matters of simple police, concerning foolish garçons whose lamps have gone out while driving home from the noces, or the careless ones who have left their horses to take care of their carts, while they themselves took friendly drinks in the café; or else people who have emptied things out of upper windows while other people were passing below—a short and easy way, commending itself so strongly to the simple common-sense of the French mind, that pains and penalties are powerless to eradicate it from national habits. There is no long list of such cases to-day, however, for our present commissary is a mild, genial little man, in a fashionable paletot, decorated with a red ribbon, and gold eye-glass. Short of emptying anything on his own well-brushed hat, or running down his short-sighted but dignified person in a cart

without lamps, honest people may do as they please. Now the last commissary was a ferocious one, diabolically zealous in his functions, who brought the whole countryside before the juge de paix. Happily the reign of such is short. Either they are soon promoted for their zeal, or degraded for the odium they incur. Anyhow, they go, and the country breathes freely again.

Withal, to anyone who knows the humours of an English country petty sessions, who has seen the long file of prisoners, the tramps, the ruffians, degraded men and unsexed women, the handcuffs and needful shackles, the array of burly police, the aspect of this present court seems strangely mild and paternal. Not that the judge himself is particularly mild. He scolds, he expostulates, and there is a force of conviction about him that makes his reproaches scathing. The fines are small indeed, but they are laid on with an air that seems to crush the culprit, and for the hardened offender there are sundry days of prison. But people are not haled about, they come and go in freedom. There is no stern janitor to demand fees and fines, with the alternative of the prison van. For these the tax-collector will send by-and-by when the thing comes round to him. And as for the prison, you can make that when convenient.

Run away? not you. A man does not abandon his civil rights for a trifle, and to exile yourself would be a worse punishment than any the law could inflict.

There is another side to the matter, of course. The absence of police and gendarmes, and the general smoothness of the proceedings, is due to an article in the code which provides that no one shall be admitted to prove by witnesses anything outside or against the procès verbal or reports of officers of police having received by law power to establish offences and contraventions. An article that would hardly suit English notions, although we have the thing practically established among us.

And now the face of the juge de paix perceptibly brightens; his eyes sparkle. He has reached the cause célèbre of the district. A case bristling with complications, that it will take all his judicial acumen to unravel. Here we have physical violence combined with verbal injuries, broken windows and even effraction of doors; a partie civile, too, who intervenes to claim damages; all these neatly packed as in a nutshell, in the procès Marfieu.

There are five defendants who answer to the summons of the huissier, Père Marfiu at the head of them, who takes his seat with modest alacrity, as if proud of his position as president of the bench of accused. The juge reviews them with an icy yet complaisant glance. They are his own now, these fine fellows, so many mice for the claws of the cat—otherwise not much to be proud of; one with a foolish face like a rabbit's, another with the sullen muzzle of a dog, the third has a snub nose and an aggravating sneer on his prominent lips; exceptional characters these whose peculiarities perform the functions of grit in the machinery of society. The fourth culprit is a mere boy overcome by the gravity of his position, and the fifth is Marfiu himself whom everybody knows. There are witnesses too in waiting, who are taken by the huissier into a private room and locked up. Then Buvot begins—it is his business to read over the procès verbal and other documents in the case, which he drawls out in a nasal tone while the juge leans back with an attentive but slightly compassionate air. As for Buvot he evidently thinks it all a bore, and so do the audience, who yawn and exchange confidences in an undertone. Even the huissier sympathises with the general feeling, and converses by nods and shrugs with a friend over the way. Only the Père Marfiu listens with the rapt attention of a pious man who hears an edifying discourse.

As the reading ceases, the juge rouses himself, and metaphorically shakes his mane. Decidedly the interest must be revived; that good Buvot has nearly sent us to sleep. But the interrogation of a witness is a matter on which the juge justly plumes himself. First comes an old lady in a snowy-white cap and short skirts, who seems pre-occupied and has an anxious expression on her face. She is vague in her notions as to her Christian and surnames, and gets into trouble with Buvot, who has to make an erasure in his book. And when the juge solemnly tells her to lift up her hand, she lifts up the wrong hand, does not know her right hand from her left, and finally lifts up both hands with the air of one who gives a good bargain. And when the juge (the matter of the hands being adjusted by the aid of the huissier) adjures her to speak the truth and the whole truth, the good woman remarks with some asperity, that she never intended anything else. All which tends

to irritate justice and amuse the thoughtless crowd. And the juge is sharp and severe in his interrogatories, all the more that the witness retains her air of abstraction and pre-occupation. Once fairly roused, however, the old dame shows some mettle, and even once or twice raises a slight laugh at the expense of the juge. "Now, you have not told the whole truth," he cries. "You have something on your mind that you keep back." Yes, very surely she had something on her mind, the witness confessed. "Speak freely," says the juge, "justice will protect you." "It is my basket that I left in the church porch, and if those gamins should get hold of it!" The juge turns contemptuously from the witness to the accused. It is they who have the word now, may put questions to the witness, always through the mouth of the juge. Père Marfiu is the first to speak. "Was I to blame in the matter, monsieur? How could I do any mischief when I was lying in the road all the time, and three of these gentlemen," turning to the bench of accused, "on the top of me?" "But silence, accused," cries the juge, "all this is not a question." "Oh, if I may not speak!" "Speak, but speak to the purpose; what do you demand from the witness?" "I would like to ask her, monsieur le juge," says Marfiu humbly: "Was I not lying in the road with three of them on the top of me?" "Faites attention," cries the juge, angrily, to the witness, whose thoughts are evidently with the missing basket; and repeats the question. "Hold," cries Buvot, who toils after the proceedings, long after them, indeed, with his pen. "I have not got that into the book." The juge repeats the question once more, and again puts it to the witness: "Did you see the accused Marfiu recumbent in the road, with three others of the accused placed upon him?" "No, monsieur," answers the witness roundly. "There, you see," exclaims the juge triumphantly to the accused, "your plan of defence comes to nothing; you had better keep quiet, I think." Marfiu sighs and looks upwards with an expression of innocence resigned to oppression, that makes him appear more Irish than ever. Indeed, the longer we look at him the more powerfully we feel the conviction that he is by race Milesian. The voice, the language, the costume are French altogether, and belong to Père Marfiu, but the hands—those hands that were not altogether inactive, perhaps, in spite of his constrained



position, when the three were on the top of him, yes—the hands are decidedly the hands of Pat Murphy. Descended, no doubt, from some refugee of the Ninety something; his great grandfather, perhaps, wore a laced coat and ruffles, but had the same passion for combat, the same faculty of getting the worst of it all ways. Naturalised, acclimatised, rooted in the land, still, through the accumulated soil pierces the shoot of the original thorn, the twig that grows into a shillelagh.

By this time the juge is worrying through with another witness. He is a marvellous man, after all, that little juge. The whole weight of the court is on his shoulders. The greffier yawns, the commissaire plays with his eyeglass, the huissier makes signals to his friends among the audience. The juge interrogates, cross-examines, hears everything, has his eyes everywhere. Just now the old lady, our first witness, thought to make her escape, had almost edged through the door, when the keen eye of the juge detected her. "Stop her! Witnesses must not go out!" "But, monsieur," exclaim half-a-dozen voices, "she is going to look for her basket." "But baskets!" cries the juge; "is the law to be slighted for baskets?"

At last the huissier, opening the door of the room where the witnesses had been confined, and assuring himself that no one is hidden behind a chair or under the table, announces that there are no more. Then the accused are called upon for their defence. The père is the only one to respond to the appeal. To be sure, he is more deeply implicated than the rest. One might have damaged the furniture, another been guilty of personal violence, a third of abusive language, but the hands of Marfieu were in it all, hands and tongue, and everything. "An entire mistake," urges the père, and cites his grey hairs, his general lamb-like character, the physical impossibility of his having done any mischief circumstanced as he was at the time, with three of them on the top of him. As for the rest, their defence was as the knife-grinder's story—they had none to give.

The commissaire should now sum up the case on behalf of the prosecution. He contents himself very sensibly with leaving the whole matter in the hands of the juge de paix. But the partie civile has something to say now, if you please: the partie civile, in the shape of a stout rubicund woman in a bright Paisley shawl, a woman who has evidently accumulated a few sous with which she

will not lightly part. She indignantly enumerates her losses, the windows the doors broken, the tabourets that the accused had turned from seats into weapons of offence, the bottle of liqueur they had broken, and the dominoes scattered about, of which a double-six was still missing. To these questions the juge addresses himself with zeal and full knowledge. Has he not been over the ground himself and estimated the damages? Of the two windows broken one had undoubtedly been previously cracked; the tabourets had holes in their rush bottoms; it was a bottle of cassis broken and not curaçoa; and as for the dominoes, the *bonne* of the establishment had confessed that the piece in question had been missing long before. But let the *partie civile* tranquilise herself, justice should be done, and, with a terrible glance at Marfieu, the offenders should pay both in purse and person.

Should we all have waited thus patiently through this long case, I wonder, if we had not expected to hear the sentence; to see old Marfieu's face when he heard how much prison he was to have, and what to pay for his diversions at the café. And then, after all, to hear that judgment was postponed till the next audience! The court rises, the wintry sunshine breaks into the room as the doors are thrown wide open, and the crowd file out noisily. Not the whole of the crowd, however. A dozen or so are left. The public audience is over, there still remains the sitting in conciliation.

This conciliation is one of the great advantages of the French procedure over the English, especially in matters of debt. When it comes to the full process of law, summons, hearing, judgment, execution, the costs under the French process are at least as heavy and oppressive as under our own county court system. But conciliation! The word itself is a pleasant one, and the thing in practice, if not more enlivening than the parchment greetings of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, is, at all events, simple and inexpensive. A citation comes by post, inviting you to meet such an one, on such a day, before the juge de paix, "to arrange the difference that divides you." The juge sits in his private room without any apparatus of gown or beretta, the greffier at his side taking minutes. There you meet your adversary face to face, and if the difference that divides you is of a pecuniary nature—say



a debt that the debtor is unable to pay all at once, the juge probably suggests a liquidation by instalments, and if the creditor consents, the arrangement becomes binding on the parties. Whatever the result, the costs of this proceeding are only ninepence; the cheapest mouthful of law within one's experience, surely, and equally satisfying as the most expensive dishes on the legal menu. After the conciliation, if the affair is not arranged, comes the formal summons by the huissier, and then expenses begin to mount up. For if the juge has the honour and dignity, it is the huissier who gets the solid pelf. The juge may think himself well off with his salary of eighty pounds a year, and a few allowances which do not reach many hundred francs, but the huissier's office is lucrative, and he has many emoluments which do not figure in official tableaux. There is Monsieur Bidaut, for instance, whose office is on the quay under the brass escutcheons that denote his quality; he is as important a man in his way as the banker. Look at the acceptances that come through his hands to be collected, on each of which he gets a small commission. The huissier's clerk, with his wallet slung round his shoulders, is a familiar object with all the tradesmen of the town, and they take care always to be ready for his visit; money counted out and packed up in rouleaux, mostly five franc-pieces, under the weight of which the young man's knees may well tremble, as he passes on his round. You will meet the same young man far away in the country, still with his wallet, and also with an armful of coloured bills announcing a sale by auction under his master's auspices. For that matter Bidaut has a sale every market-day of odds and ends which clients have placed in his hands or which he may have seized in his professional character. If you buy anything you will find that, in addition to the price, you have to pay the *enchère*—the auctioneer's commission, that is—of five centimes in a franc; and should it be anything that looks, the weak-kneed clerk will remind you with a grin that by immemorial custom a franc is due to him, the clerk, for every key. Bidaut will give you credit, too, if he believes you to be solvent, charging you, however, at the rate of some thirty per cent. per annum, which ought to pay him.

Altogether, to form a perfect notion of our provincial huissier, you must combine your English country solicitor—taking away all the non-contentious part of him, the

conveyancing, the will-making, the settlements, and so on, which go to make up the French notary—with a good dash of the local auctioneer, and to this add something of the accountant and general agent, with a foundation of county-court bailiff and sheriff's officer. But he is not a bad fellow, after all, our M. Bidaut; he has bowels of compassion, is averse to extreme measures, rather holds back than urges on exacting creditors. And he is all the more liked and respected in his office that he is no longer an instrument in handing people over to the goaler. For, in France, imprisonment for debt is really abolished, not merely colourably as in England. The last relic of slavery as an institution has been there swept away; a foolish noxious relic. There was common sense, at least, in the notion of selling your debtor as a slave and pocketing what he fetched. There is no sense, common or otherwise, in shutting him up in compulsory idleness, depriving him of the power of earning his bread, to say nothing of paying off his debts. But if Bidaut is content with things as they are, so is not his confrère Lambert, who vainly regrets the power with which he was once armed. Nowadays his chief delight is in a bankruptcy, when the defaulter goes to prison as a preliminary and indispensable step in the proceedings. But once sure of his man, and even Lambert can be amiable, especially when the bankrupt has the command of money. It is those poor honest wretches who have struggled on till they are without a penny who may expect the harshest treatment at his hands.

Of the two, Bidaut enjoys the greatest popularity and gets the most business; but Lambert is the favourite both with the juge and the parquet of the court above, who appreciate his stern inflexibility. Both Bidaut and Lambert drive smart new vehicles with good horses and glittering electro-plated lamps, while the juge trots about the country in a shabby old cabriolet. Justice, indeed, is pretty constantly on the road; by no means a sedentary justice, sitting on a well-stuffed cushion, listening with half-closed eyes; but active and wide-awake, inquisitive, and even combatant. When our little juge has finished his sitting in conciliation, he will be off to place the seals upon the belongings of some dead person, about whose succession his relatives are quarrelling; or he is pledged to a stern propriétaire, who has demanded his intervention to evict a refractory tenant. Perhaps a mandate is

on its way from the parquet, directing him to investigate some misdemeanour which is not promising enough to bring over the procureur and the juge d'instruction. And while he has his regular audiences twice a week, he may hear cases at any time, even on Sundays and fêtes, and whether morning, noon, or night. He may even hear them in his own house if the outer doors of the house be kept open, and may summon people to appear before him on the instant.

By this time the conciliation business is over, and the big doors of the court-room are finally closed; market is over, too, and the country people are driving away. The old lady has found her basket, its contents all safe. The *partie civile* is loading her big market-cart with groceries and bakeries for the week's supply. And the *Père Marfieu* trudges slowly homewards, brooding over his *procès*. Depend upon it, if the juge has postponed his sentence, it is not with any notion of making it easy for the *père*. Eugénie solves the matter in her ready way. "Did I not tell you, monsieur, if the juge has given the *père* a week to look about him, it is that he may fly the country, and so we may be rid of him." We shall see; but my opinion is that we shall find the *père* at the gate of judgment next Saturday, waiting for his punishment. He comes of a race that will take a good deal of punishment.

#### APRIL SHOWERS.

SLIDING down the south wind's pinions,  
Gleaming 'neath the gleaming skies,  
As the tears and smiles of welcome,  
Glistening, meet in loving eyes;

April showers,  
Soft sweet showers,  
Call to hill, and glen, and plain,  
"Spring and we are come again."

Wild March winds across the moorland,  
Swept at their own bitter will;  
Wild March winds on northern seaboards,  
Wailed in music, keen and shrill;

April showers,  
To the flowers,  
Whisper, "Ye are done with strife,  
We are here, with warmth and life."

The north-easter, black and sullen,  
Shrinks before their balmy breath,  
Crouches in his gloomy cavern,  
Fierce as hate, and cold as death;

April showers,  
Bright quick showers,  
Gem the grasses, feed the buds,  
Kiss the leaflets in the woods.

And the mourner's heavy eyelids,  
Lift to watch their flashing play;  
And the frost of loss and sorrow  
Melts beneath their smile away;

April showers,  
Wakening showers,  
Hope and promise blended bring  
To Man and Nature, with the Spring.

#### AN UNEQUAL BARGAIN.

##### A STORY IN THREE PARTS. PART II.

WHEN the world heard that its idol of the hour, Vere Urquhart, had given up being a mere *flâneur*, and taken to plodding, the world was surprised, amused, interested, and then—forgot all about him.

That is comparatively. Some, who had been his close companions, watched and wondered; thought it was quite the right thing for a man to do, to put his shoulder to the wheel, join the struggle for existence, and wrest from fate a name and a position among men—but had no mind to follow so admirable an example all the same.

There was one who watched, not wondering but expectant, sure that the result of effort would be success. What if Vere Urquhart's place in many a gay scene of which he once had been the life and soul was vacant? A man cannot toil hard for distinction in any walk of life, and yet give the greater part of his time to social claims.

And this was Ashton Meadows's work; that is, her hand had given the first impetus. Ultimately Vere, tasting the strong wine of ambition for himself, needed no further spur, and was perhaps at times somewhat forgetful of the woman to whose influence he owed so much.

But her thought of him was as a lamp burning with soft and steady flame before a shrine; a lamp that never flickered, never wavered, but burnt on, serenely shining.

She had done the work that her hand had found to do, and done it with all her might.

If in its fulfilment much of the zest of her own life had died out; if many a pleasure that had once been delightful lacked the spell of the past; if the gayest crowd seemed a solitude for lack of one presence; the stir and battle of life about her a silence for lack of one voice; if these things were so, she made no sign. Rather was she more than ever to all the men and women about her, "that delightful Mrs. Meadows." She was not a woman to do things by halves, or to regret a thing when done, having been once convinced that it was right.

As to Vere Urquhart, in his estimation she was friend and counsellor: a woman who had spoken out to him boldly and fearlessly the simple truth, utterly regardless if its sound were smooth or rough, sweet or discordant to his ears.

He had not listened to her words with-

out some smart at the time, some feeling as of one being hardly dealt with. But as the months wore on—as here and there success began to crown his efforts, he looked back, and the words that had seemed almost cruel were as words written in letters of light.

He wrote to her sometimes; not very often; for his leisure hours were few. He wrote cordial cheery letters, and sometimes Ashton came upon a sentence that was like sunshine to her. He had no intent to let this good friend of his drift away from him, or he from her. He honoured and revered her more than any other woman living; loved her, too, after a fashion of his own.

How then could he forget her?

But his life was running in new lines. New friends, new interests surrounded him on every side; and so the past grew, not forgotten, but dim.

When the two met (which they did, only far more rarely than of yore) Ashton had the same cordial greeting for him as ever; the same glad light shone in the golden-brown eyes as they met his; the same smile of welcome parted the lips that were always just a little sad, even in their smiling.

Everyone seemed content, except "that good Jerningham."

Often than ever, just at this time, did that strange troubled look come over the poor faded face; oftener than ever had Ashton to smile away the shadow. Even caps, looked upon as a thing to make existence desirable, appeared to fail; and more than once Ashton found her faithful companion seated, hopeless and dejected, before an undefined mass of ends of ribbon, lace, and feathers; her hands, needle and all, lying listlessly in her ample lap.

"When will he come again, like he used to do?" said Mrs. Jerningham one day, in that spasmodic manner peculiar to her. Then, without waiting Ashton's answer, she touched, very tenderly and lovingly, a group of flowers upon the table. "It is like there being none of these," she said; "it is like having no sunshine, being without him."

Ashton soothed and comforted her; and so the mood passed.

But the woman's simple words had gone home to the listener's heart.

Yes; it was like that—like the loss of life's sunshine and its flowers; and yet she did not repent; she would not have had it otherwise.

Time passed. Twice over had the summer with its wealth of flowers, its ceaseless whirl of gay and giddy scenes, come and gone; twice the winter quiet, with its long lamp-lit evenings, pleasant times made charming by the study of new books, new thoughts, new theories.

And now God was once more giving his great spring gifts of flowers to the world, waking from its winter sleep.

Yellow primroses began to lift their golden faces from beneath the suburban hedgerows; violets, piled high upon the flower-girls' trays a perfumed pyramid, were sold at every street corner. The parks began to break into every shade of green, blue, and yellow, grey and roseate. Birds twittered madly in every bough, chattering no doubt of sweet domestic joys to come; while the solemn ~~trains~~ cawed a bass to Nature's choir of feathered songsters.

It was a time to make one glad at heart, a time to make the burden of the weary seem less heavy, the sorrow of the sad less bitter. And, perhaps, in all her life Ashton Meadows had never been so happy.

For the world that, two years ago, had forgotten Vere Urquhart, began to remember him again. His name was on the lips of men whose good opinion conferred distinction, whose friendship was a sign of honour, like the medal on a soldier's breast. He was making way—sudden, brilliant way, in his profession. It was "really wonderful for so young a man," said the world, with a general raising of eyebrows.

Others said, "Who'd have thought it?" and shrugged their foolish shoulders as much as to say they, too, could distinguish themselves if they cared to try; they, too, could display their grand but latent abilities before an admiring world. Some of these had been ironically jestful over the young barrister's sudden relinquishment of an idle life of pleasure, but now he was "a rising man," therefore they shouted with the crowd.

Perhaps no one had so little to say about all these things as Ashton Meadows. True, her ear was quick to catch the faintest echo of the sound of Vere's name, but her tongue had few words to say in praise of him. "They used to be such friends!" someone once said, "but now, she seems to have lost all interest in him. She is a charming woman is Mrs. Meadows, but she is like the rest: a man only has any attraction for her so long as he worships at her shrine, be it in love, or, as in this case, only in friendship."

Vere never wronged her so. He knew that in her interest in his welfare was neither "variableness nor shadow of turning." If at any time in those past two years of struggle apparent reverse had disheartened him, to whom else had he turned for comfort and fresh hope? Had she ever failed him? Had strengthening thoughts, had cheering words been lacking?

No; she had been to him a trusty friend, a faultless counsellor in very truth.

Just when the springtide was sweetest and brightest, on one of the sunniest days the new year had yet brought in its train, Mrs. Meadows set Mrs. Jerningham all in a flutter by telling her that Mr. Urquhart was coming that very afternoon to have tea out of the little teacups with no handles; just as he used to do ever so long ago. Mrs. Jerningham ambled about from room to room full of delicious agitations on the subject of caps. Every moment her mind, tossed to and fro upon an ocean of uncertainty, vacillated between the rival claims of blue and amber, crimson and magenta. Ashton, with a still and happy radiance in her eyes, and singing softly to herself meanwhile, arranged and re-arranged the flowers in her rooms, making high festival, woman-like, for her coming guest, with all the beauty she could gather round her. She loved primroses—those flowers of hope—and, under the touch of her deft fingers they soon grouped themselves all about the place, in baskets, in shallow china dishes, in tall tapering vases, anywhere, until the rooms seemed full of the yellow sheen of a sunshine of their own.

After all, Vere arrived sooner than he was expected, and the two ladies had but just come in from a drive.

Jerningham, hearing him announced at one door, vanished promptly by another. It would not do to spoil the effect of the cap that had been at such great length decided upon, by being seen first in her bonnet.

Ashton, who never appeared to be taken by surprise under any circumstances whatever, came quietly forward to greet her visitor. If her heart beat heavily and fast, there was no outward sign of betrayal.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, unfastening her bonnet as she spoke, and laying it on a couch hard by. The wrap about her shoulders followed; she passed her hands quickly over her hair, and her toilette was complete.

Vere's blue-grey eyes rested on her contentedly.

She was not beautiful; he had never thought her that, but she was perfectly graceful, faultlessly artistic, and her dress always seemed to suit her as exactly as a calyx suits the flower it enfolds.

Her voice, too, what a pleasant voice it was to listen to!

"Of course you are glad to see me?" he said, smiling, "and I to see you; that was part of our bargain, was it not?"

He was not a man given to be diffident as to his own value, as Lady Clara had discovered; but self-confidence, though detestable in a woman, is not altogether unattractive in a man, when refinement goes with it.

A wood fire burned cheerily in the low wide grate, glinting on the primroses, and helping them to shine out in distant corners and unexpected places. The evenings were still cold, the days bright and beautiful, yet short-lived, so the fire was pleasant.

In fact, Vere thought that nothing could be more restful, or more delightful, than the pretty flower-decked rooms and their gentle occupant.

"How is my good friend Mrs. Jerningham?" he said presently.

"She is very well; she has gone to take off her bonnet, and put on her cap—a long process."

"I am glad of that. I hope it will take her at least an hour. I want to have you all to myself, you see; there is so much to say."

Then he looked all round the rooms, and drew a satisfied breath.

"What a long time it seems since I have been here," he said.

"Yes; busy folks have but little time for paying visits."

There was a dancing light in her eyes as she spoke, a sort of tender raillery that touched him infinitely. He came close to her side.

"See," he said, "here is something for you, Ashton."

He put a book into her hands, and then laid his hand upon her shoulder and stood so, while she bent her head to read.

It was one of the leading journals of the day, a sort of mental arena, where the thoughts and theories of great men met in tournament. And there among the names of men known wherever mental prowess and intellectual culture held sway, was the name of Vere Urquhart.

Ashton looked at the open page until the letters swam before her eyes; but she did not speak.



She dared not just yet.

Her silence irritated the by no means patient individual at her side.

"I was afraid you would see it before I could bring it. I waited to lay it at your feet—the first-fruits of my literary labour. You see I have made good use even of my leisure hours. Are you satisfied?"

He spoke kindly—almost tenderly—but his hand had fallen from her shoulder.

That silence of hers had galled him. How could he tell it meant far more than any words?

But she was silent now no longer.

The tears that had threatened to blind her were driven back. Hitherto she had only been able to feel intensely, passionately, silently.

Now her tongue was loosed, and surely Vere had no fault to find with what the sweet lips uttered; for suddenly he bent his head and kissed them softly. It was not a lover's kiss. It was gently, reverently given—taken, not returned.

And yet to Ashton it seemed like something for which she had waited all her life.

Surely, much as she had suffered, strange and eventful as had been the years that now lay behind her like a black and turgid river, whose depths she had once forded, she had never known what it was to live until Vere Urquhart's lips touched hers. She had never known the meaning of the word "rejoice" until she knew that all was well with him, and that he held her dear—how, or in what fashion, she knew not, but still held her dear, in that she had been his trusty guide and friend.

She was no fool to dream things were, or might be, as she willed, because she willed. She never shirked the facing of the truth. She knew that Vere got more than he gave. She rated that kiss at its just worth, and no more: a man's sudden, tender impulse towards a woman who had cared for him, and let him see that she cared for him, and whose influence had made his life.

Nevertheless, when Jerningham, resplendent in a cap that cast all past efforts in that line into the shade, had come ambling in, made tea, and ministered breathlessly to all Mr. Urquhart's needs in the way of refreshment, when all this was over, and Vere had gone, sitting by the fitful light of the wood fire, shading her face with one hand, alone with her own thoughts in the gloaming, Ashton Meadows knew for her

life could be "never the same again"—it must always be a sweeter, fuller, more complete thing, though only by virtue of a tender memory that should last through all time.

She did not see Vere Urquhart again for some time to come. She read his paper, heard it discussed, saw it criticised.

He had broken into new ground—he had thrown down a social gauntlet, and there was no lack of hands to pick it up. Her inner life was full of interests that were his, because they were his.

And so the time of primroses passed away; roses bloomed everywhere, the season grew to its height, then waned.

People began to leave town, but many lingered, and among these Lady Clara Lumley. She had no fancy for rural life—she hated crossing the sea—when London was full, when the pace was fastest, she was best content. Just towards the end of the season this wilful old lady would give a brilliant entertainment of some sort, for which entertainment many of the nicest people would put off their departure and upset their plans.

She was going to do this now. She was chuckling over disarranging everybody's ideas as to what they would do, and when they would go. The best artistes in town were to appear at her house.

"And Vere Urquhart is coming," she said to Ashton radiantly; "I told him he must lay aside all his musty fusty old papers for once, and ornament an old woman's rooms. He made a vast favour of coming, but there's 'metal more attractive,' eh?—it isn't all done to please me, you know."

Ashton wondered what her eccentric ladyship might mean, and was going to ask her, when a group of people came in, and their tête-à-tête was over. Then she forgot all about the matter, for Jerningham—that faithful and devoted one—was sorely ill, and night and day Ashton tended her with loving hands.

It even seemed doubtful if she would be able to go to Lady Clara's soirée at all. It all depended upon poor Jerningham.

Perhaps that worthy woman, feeling how much responsibility rested with her in the matter, made an effort to rally. At all events, two days before the great event, she was so much better that Ashton went out for a drive in the afternoon: a welcome change after a long confinement to a sick-room.

Just as her brougham was turning in

at her own gates, she overtook Vere Urquhart.

To stop the carriage was the work of a moment.

"Were you coming to see me?" she said.

He stood bare-headed at the window. Never, Ashton thought, had she seen him look so handsome, so winning, so much everything that a man of culture and refinement ought to be. And yet there was something about him unfamiliar to her—something strange, a restlessness of manner, a languor in the grey-blue eyes that met her own, a trouble stirring in their clear and steadfast depths.

"Yes, I was on my way to see you. I have just seen Lady Clara, and she tells me Mrs. Jerningham is better; this being so, will you give me half an hour?"

"Of course I will—an hour—two, if you like."

"No" was a word that did not obtain in Ashton's vocabulary where Vere Urquhart was concerned.

She made room for him in the carriage at her side, and they drove up the avenue.

"Wait a moment while I run up and see how Jerningham is," she said, when they got into the hall. "You know your way, Vere, or ought to do by this time;" and with a smile and a nod she was gone.

He was somewhat restless as he waited for her reappearance, pacing up and down the two pretty drawing-rooms, and looking now out of this window, now that.

"You are admiring my rose?" said Ashton, coming up behind him; a dainty figure all in cream-colour, a purple iris at her throat; but one look at his face showed her that he had seen neither roses nor cyclamens.

He had seen nothing, for the veil of his own thoughts obscured all outward things.

"What is it?" said Ashton, the golden-brown eyes full of wistful tenderness.

"Many things," he answered.

"Tell me of them," she said, seating herself in a low causeuse near the open window, "and then you shall have some tea."

"You were always a good listener," he went on.

And then, instead of saying anything more, began to pace up and down, across and across the broad recess of the window.

Ashton's hands were cold, though the evening was sultry, and great banks of

purple clouds brooded on the horizon. But she knew that a man likes to tell a story his own way, and never cares to have it dragged from him by questioning.

So she kept silence; her eyes, quiet, faithful, clear, watching the pacing, restless figure, the bowed head, the folded arms; noting the deepened lines in the fair, clear-cut face, the weariness of the earnest eyes.

Suddenly Vere came to a halt right in front of her.

"You have been so good to me—so good," he said; "and now I am sure you will not fail me."

"I hope I never fail anyone that needs help at my hands, least of all you."

"Well, I want to speak to you about my cousin, Mrs. Charteris."

"I do not like your cousin, Mrs. Charteris."

The little dusky head was carried proudly now; the lips that could be so tender took a proud, set curve.

"I know you do not like her."

"She is not in my set. I do not care for the men and women whom she makes her friends."

"I know. I was there to-day, and she told me she had not met you more than three times all through the season. Still, I take you to be a woman far above all petty prejudices—above all things small and pitiful; I take you to be one about whom all is grand, and great, and generous; and for that reason I want to interest you in one who—"

"Interests you?"

"Just so."

"But why this sudden interest in Mrs. Charteris?"

"It is not Mrs. Charteris of whom I am speaking, it is of a young girl who is staying with her—a girl of whom you may have heard—Rosalie Latreille."

A thrush—determined apparently to make the best of matters, and turn his back upon the blue-black mass of clouds in the west—began to pipe and trill in the branches of a beech-tree near.

Ashton, turning more to the window, seemed listening to his song.

Vere, beginning that restless pacing to and fro once more, found words enough now that the ice was once broken.

It was an old, old story.

He had met this girl by accident. She was like a flower—a poem—a head by Greuze—what you will that is loveliest and best! He did not like his cousin, Mrs. Charteris; even more heartily he

disliked the set with which she was surrounded. It would be hard to find a set more calculated to be harmful to a young and unsophisticated nature like that of Rosalie Latreille.

It was a golden nature—a nature quick of sympathy, ready to take impressions, artlessly pleased with the admiration of the crowd.

Under the influence of a woman like Ashton Meadows this nature might become—anything. Its capabilities for good were positively illimitable.

The thrush sung on an accompaniment to the telling of the story; and Ashton still seemed to listen.

But when Vere was silent, she turned round—she spoke:

"And so it is Kismet—is it, Vere? You have met your fate!"

"Yes, it is Kismet; I have met my fate."

"And you want me to help you?"

"Have I not always wanted you to help me—ever since I knew you?"

"Tell me what I am to do."

## VISITED ON THE CHILDREN.

BY THEO GIFT.

### BOOK II.

#### CHAPTER XV. A BUNDLE OF NEWS.

TELL where Mr. Vane was the evening of that there dreadful thunderstorm in July, when three men was killed by lightning in a barge on the river, an' a tree on the Embankment was split in two 'alves? In course she could an' easy, seein' as how it was only the day but one afore 'e left 'er, an' he were at home all the evenin'. The 'ole of it? Yes, sir, the 'ole of it. Dined at 'is club he did as customary, or so she believed; but come 'ome quite early about nine with another gent, a Mr. Martin, complainin' of 'eadache from the thunder in the hair, an' astin' for a cup o' your strongest tea, Mrs. Brooker, which well he knew was to be depended on, for no waterin' o' lodgers' teapots in 'er 'ouse if she knowed it, nor no such low tricks of any sort, as she would despise 'em an' never permitted fur a minnit. Did he go out again? No, he didn't; nor no one else dropped in. It was rainin' that 'ard when t'other gent went as you wouldn't ha' turned a cat out if you could 'elp it; an' Lizzie—that's the gurl there—had grumbled orful at bein' sent for a 'ansom. Not that she need make a fuss though, as was left on the work's

doorstep when a babby on the rainiest night of the year, as you can ast the matron; an' Mr. Vane a-givin' 'er a shillin' too for 'er trouble; but they gurls al'ays will 'ave their growl. "Thank you kindly, I'm sure, sir. Only too glad to be of use to any gentleman of the ministry, as is certing to 'ave a good end in their questionings."

So Mrs. Brooker, landlady of Number —, Bacon Chambers, as she chose to call the lodgings she let to single gentlemen in Arundel Street; and if ever a couple of half-crowns were as willingly given as received, it was those two bestowed by the curate in exchange for the information which satisfactorily proved that, so far from having been at Chadleigh End on the evening of that luckless Thursday, Gareth had passed it in his own rooms, and, after his friend left, alone.

Lion felt as if he had gained a victory.

It had not been won without some trouble, however. He had written to Gareth Vane, a very brief note, informing him that, as he had not been at Chadleigh End for some time, he was probably unaware that a scandal seriously affecting his own honour and that of another person was being spread about by parties inimical to him, and that to silence it, it would be necessary for him to come forward and prove where and in what company he was on the evening of Thursday, the twenty-second of July.

To this note the curate had no answer whatever.

He waited a week, and then, deciding that Gareth must have moved his lodgings, and remembering that he had mentioned the name of his club on the evening that he had dined at the vicarage, he addressed a post-card to him at the latter establishment, marked "Urgent," and merely saying that an important letter had been sent to him at his old address, and was waiting for an answer.

To this he got a post-card in return from the club porter.

Mr. Vane had left England for a yacht-tour in the North, and was not expected back for two or three weeks. Any letters for him might be sent to the club, where he forwarded his address when he wanted them sent on to him.

Lion could not leave his work that day, as it was Saturday, and he had his sermon to prepare; but on Monday morning he put himself in the train and went up to London. His first visit was to the club,

and there he had no difficulty. Gareth Vane was evidently a regular habitué of the place, one whose habits were well-known, and who had no desire for concealing them; and the fact of the Thursday night in question having been both the last but one of his stay in London and the date of a noted thunderstorm made it easier for people to remember what they had seen of him.

He had dined there? Yes, certainly, and for the last time, though he had looked in on Saturday to give orders about his letters, &c. What time was dinner? Seven punctual, and there a Mr. Martin, also a member of the club, dined with him. They went out about a quarter to eight. Mr. Martin was in a hurry, having orders for one of the theatres lying on the table by him; but waiter remembered hearing Mr. Vane say he had such a confounded headache he didn't feel fit for it. What was Mr. Martin's address? Didn't know, and hadn't authority to give it if he did; but—thank you, sir; much obliged, I'm sure—thought it most likely he would come in to dinner to-night, as there was a new piece on at the Imperial, and he always dined at the club on first nights. Waiter thought he did some of the "critikising" for the papers, though he looked young for it; but they did employ very young gents for that now, perhaps till they was fit to do something out of their own 'eads. Would the gentleman like to leave his card for him? And, after a moment's hesitation, Lionel did, adding that he would call again about dinner-time.

He did so, and found Mr. Martin eating his meal rapidly, as though fearing that the interview would be likely to delay him in his pursuit of the drama as viewed from the critic's stall. Not quite so communicative, this gentleman, inclined to look shyly at the Roman collar and felt hat of his visitor, and to be very reserved and suspicious lest some "parson's trap" should be in process of laying for him; but Lion's natural frankness and bonhomie soon disarmed him, and when he found that the parson was an acquaintance of that "gay dog, Vane," and wanted only to serve the latter by quashing an ugly falsehood which had been spread about him in his absence, Mr. Martin's scruples gave way, and he condescended to give the very slight information required from him, namely, that he and Mr. Vane had gone to the theatre on the evening in question, that the latter had abused the piece and complained of head-

ache; and that, therefore, as it was not a "first night, and he was only there in an unprofessional character"—(N.B.—Mr. Martin was young. He was twenty-three, and very raw; therefore to be excused this parenthesis and the accent in which it was delivered)—they had adjourned to Vane's rooms, where he stayed for an hour or so, and then went home. Hadn't seen or heard from his friend since; but knew he was yachting somewhere, and someone had said he was going to be married to a rich widow. Didn't believe that, however; Vane not at all a marrying man; too fond of his liberty by half, and too fond of pretty little girls' photographs on his mantel-piece. Here note, that your people who begin by being extra reserved not unfrequently end by becoming superfluously garrulous. Lion was ungrateful enough to get rather impatient of young Martin's confidences before a break in the latter enabled him to express his thanks for the information accorded, and then to take leave and hurry off to Bacon Chambers. How he fared there we have seen.

"The best day's work I've done for years," he thought as he put himself in the train again for Chadleigh End. "May I be as lucky to-morrow with my friends Jowl and De Boonyen! To silence their tongues is a duty which must be done at any sacrifice of time and annoyance."

But before doing that or performing another duty—hardly, perhaps, sacrificial, but still more to his mind; that, namely, of going over to Dilworth to triumph over his mother with the proof of Sybil Dysart's truth and innocence, he heard something of the De Boonyens which almost took his breath away, and showed him that their tongues, at any rate, must have ample occupation just then on their own affairs, without transgressing over other people. A note was waiting for him from the Rev. Mr. Beale when he returned from London, and it requested that gentleman's "dear friend Ashleigh" to publish the banns of marriage on the Sunday next ensuing, and the two following ones, between Timothy Beale, widower, of Number Two, Alpha Cottages, Epsom, and Horatia Maude De Boonyen, spinster, of Hapsburg Hall, in the parish of Chadleigh End.

Of a certainty, Lionel carried a budget of news with him when he set off for the Rectory.

He found Mrs. Ashleigh, however, full of the Beale and De Boonyen subject already, and in so merry a mood over it,



that he was fain to let her have it out before even commencing on his own special errand, as to which, indeed, she seemed so provokingly indifferent that he got almost angry.

"I did not know you were so intimate with these people," he said. "Is it true, then? I took it for a mild outbreak of insanity on old Beale's part. He marry that ugly little Horatia Maude! Why, he has barely twopence-halfpenny a year to keep himself and his children on. What are they thinking of?"

"Of what people in love generally think, I suppose," said his mother. "'Old' Beale—Fie on the arrogance of you very young men! You will be calling me old next—is barely forty, and little Horatia Maude is four-and-twenty, and she has been in love with him any time during the last three years. It was a perambulator that brought her passion to the surface. About a month ago she met him out walking with the five rough-headed little Beales, and wheeling the youngest, the club-footed one, in a perambulator. It was too much for Horatia Maude. She might have withstood the rough heads of the elder ones, but that domestic machine propelled by the reverend hands of Mr. Beale was too much for her. The secret broke forth beneath its wheels. In the worthy gentleman's own words he could not help seeing that she cared for him, and as he had always had "a special esteem and regard for the chastened amiability of her character," it occurred to him that Providence might have intended its late pecuniary blessings as means to a higher and life-long happiness both for himself and Miss De Boonyen."

"Pecuniary blessings! What on earth did he mean? I never heard of poor Beale being troubled with them."

"A friend has lately given him a nomination to Christ's Hospital for his eldest boy, and promised the same to the second when he is old enough. That will take two off his hands for some years, and the poor man felt quite rich on the strength of it. He and Horatia Maude clasped hands over the perambulator in consequence. My dear Lion, I shall certainly make her a present of one when she requires such an article."

"I shall give her my blessing. Bravo, little Horatia! I didn't know there was so much good stuff in her. But how on earth did they coax the old people to consent?"

"They did not try to coax anyone at all.

The De Boonyens were half-mad when they heard of it, which was by the lovers walking into old De Boonyen's study, and announcing that they were going to get married, and would be obliged by his blessing, &c. But what could they do? Mrs. de B. ranted and shrieked at her daughter, Mr. de B. bullied and threatened the lover; but Horatia was of age, she had a thousand pounds of her own, which her father (so like him!) had given her as a birthday present the day she became twenty-one, and which, of course, she had never spent, and she declared that, so far from going against her parents in her choice, she had fully believed it would be the very thing to please her mother, who had constantly told her that a clergyman's wife would be the happiest position for her, had made her read theological books, and ask Mr. Ashleigh questions about them, and had even told her once that she might encourage any attentions from him without fear of being rebuked by her parents, as, though he was only a curate, and not rich, there were higher considerations than money, which she might trust them for her sake to appreciate."

Lionel roared with laughter.

"'Higher considerations!' That means family. Ah, we all know how high you hold yourself, Mrs. mother, and what Mrs. de Boonyen thinks of position. Poor Horatia doesn't seem to have understood her mother's little views. But what about Beale?"

"He was more impracticable still; rather seemed to think that he was rewarding Horatia's devotion than, as Mr. de Boonyen put it, 'presuming on her idiocy,' and calmly told both parents that he had only done so after much thought and prayer, both for the maiden, his children, and himself, and after having made himself assured that the sinfully senseless pomps and luxuries in which Horatia had been brought up were as offensive to her nature as his own, and that her happiness would really lie in the pure and holy poverty of a Christian minister's wife. Old De Boonyen thought this was all humbug, of course, and tried to frighten him by threatening never to give his daughter a brass farthing if she married him, on which Mr. Beale offered him his hand, saying that was exactly what he wished to stipulate for, that he disapproved of women having money at all, and that, though he would not insist on Horatia Maude's renouncing her thousand pounds, he trusted that when

once his wife, she would look on it merely as a means afforded her by Providence for doing good to her poorer neighbours; and for herself would be content, like his late and lamented wife, to rely on what he could do for her.

"Can you put on her boots and do her 'air?' said old De Boonyen in his brutal way. 'She's never done either in her life that I know of, and I don't suppose you can afford to take her French maid along with her.'

"I certainly would not if I could," said Mr. Beale, 'since I consider that every woman ought to be able and willing to perform such offices for herself. Should she be at any time sick or enfeebled, however, which God forbid, I trust that she will find that her husband's more sacred duties will not prevent him from doing any service for her that a maid could render; aye, and more tenderly.'

"My dear Lion, what was the good of saying anything to a man like that? There was no end of fuss and quarrelling and disagreeableness, of course; but Horatia vowed that she would rather be Mr. Beale's servant than any other man's wife, and that if he were sent away she would go into a convent; and wept such torrents of tears over every insult to him, that at last her father was moved. He's not altogether a bad old man, you know. His wife has taken great pains with him, but the natural 'bunion' still shows through the very thin boot of adventitious grandeur, and responds to—ahem! to pressure; and Horatia's appeals to what he had often called his happy days in the homely poverty of his early life moved him. The next person to conquer was Mrs. de Boonyen, and as she was far more unapproachable, I was called in. Mr. Beale called here and told me the whole story in confidence (I've heard it from each side), and, at Horatia's request, I put on my grandest gown and manner, and drove to Hapsburg Hall to pay her mamma a visit, in the course of which I took care to congratulate her on the news I had heard of her daughter's engagement to our esteemed friend Mr. Beale."

"You did? You bold woman! Did she tell you you were quite mistaken, and ring the bell for you to be shown out?"

"Not at all. She tried to do the former, but I was too clever for her; and she had said too much to me on the unseemliness of family quarrels, as instanced by the Dysart scandal, and the disgrace of rebellious

daughters, as instanced by Sybil Dysart in contrast to her own docile and well-brought-up children, to care to own that they and herself were now in the same boat. Besides, I gave her no chance to do so, for I not only assumed that the match had her consent, but was of her making, and paid her the prettiest and most cordial compliments on it; spoke of Mr. Beale's nobility of character and position as a clergyman, and of the esteem in which we all held him, in the most eulogistic terms, hoped that I might never have more anxiety about my son than she would have about her son-in-law, told her laughingly I quite saw now what certain hints she had given me as to her preference for the clergy and her contempt of mere mercenary matches for her daughters meant, and that I heartily respected her for her wisdom on the subject; and I finished by asking if dear Horatia would not come in and give me a kiss in earnest of the friendship which must in future exist between us as wives of men in the same profession and united by the same interests. It was too much altogether for poor Mrs. de Boonyen. She knew her husband had tacitly given in already, and I suppose she thought it would be more for her dignity to do the same. She sent for Horatia without a word, and if ever an ugly little face expressed abject gratitude that girl's did for me when I kissed and congratulated her, and then turned to her mother and asked when the lovers would come and dine with me."

"You are the queen of diplomats; and I should think they were grateful to you. I can imagine you quite well with that imposing, suave, and affable manner of yours well on, and laughing in your sleeve all the time. Do you laugh at everyone, I wonder? And so the marriage is to be at once?"

"In a month, yes. That is quite sudden, and a separate piece of news. Mr. Beale was offered a living in Dorsetshire the day before yesterday, on condition that he could enter on residence by the second week in October. He went straight to the Hall and pleaded for an early marriage, that he might take his wife with him; and, as things are not very pleasant for Horatia at home since her victory, nor her lover very welcome there, it was thought better on all sides to agree."

"I'm very glad of it, and I wish old Beale joy. Wish me joy, too, mother. I've listened to your story very patiently, though I've been longing all the time to tell

you one which ought to be a thousand times more interesting to us. Don't you want to hear the result of my enquiries into the mystery of that Thursday night?"

"That—what night?" said Mrs. Ashleigh, opening her eyes. She knew perfectly well; but she had seen Lionel was getting impatient, and impatience was a vice she never gave way to. Lionel, however, was too straightforward not to take her seriously.

"What night?" he repeated almost angrily. "Why, the night poor Sybil spent in old Jowl's hut. Mother, I have sifted the whole story, and if ever an innocent girl was vilified, she has been." And then he dashed off into an eager narration of all he had found out, marching up and down the room in front of his mother the while, as if to work off in movement the triumph which shone in every line of his honest face.

"So she never saw that Vane at all, either on the evening in question or afterwards, for we have Jenny's word for the latter," he concluded, pausing at last in his walk to face his mother with shining eyes. "And the foulest slander that ever was invented is proved to be as false and worthless as its promoters. The wonder to me is how they dared—but there! if some, even among ourselves, could listen to them, one can't wonder at anything. Mother, when are you going to see Sybil and Jenny now?"

Mrs. Ashleigh looked up with the same calmly-open eyes. Lion might excite himself and prance about her drawing-room as much as he pleased, but it only made his mother assume a more placid aspect, and devote herself with keener interest to the piece of crewel-work in her hands.

"To see them, dear—the Dysart girls?" she said with the slightest little quizzical smile about her mouth. "Why, really——"

"Yes, the Dysart girls!" cried Lion. Her manner had damped his spirits considerably, but he tried not to show it. "You will go to see them now, surely? You're too just not to do so; and I think you're too just not to beg Sybil's pardon into the bargain."

"I think it is Sybil's part to beg mine; and I believe she agrees with me," said Mrs. Ashleigh. "At any rate I have had the pleasure (don't you think that dull green looks better against the blue, so?) of giving it to her; and I am glad now to have done so, since it seems very clear to me from your story (my scissors, please)

that this man has deserted her in her turn. Poor child! that accounts still more clearly for the heart-break in her eyes. And yet she doesn't even pretend not to care for him as much as ever."

"She—— Why, mother, what do you mean?" cried Lion, starting. "Have you seen her, then? Have you been there?"

His mother smiled at him with bland superiority.

"You have not been corresponding with Jenny of late, I see," she said calmly. "Certainly I have been there. Your father and I went together yesterday, and—let me see—I was there five days ago as well. Jenny sent her love to you, by-the-bye; but as I have not seen you since, I have not been able to deliver it."

"Five days ago!" repeated Lion, disregarding the rest. "Why, that was the day after I wrote to you telling you——"

"Telling me Jenny's history of her sister's doings. Exactly!" said Mrs. Ashleigh, nodding. "I don't wonder you are surprised. It was very improper of Jenny to put confidence in young men which she refused to their elderly mothers; and I told her so. As, however, she was gracious enough to forgive me for giving her cause for the refusal I was obliged in courtesy to return the compliment—Why, Lion! Lion! what are you doing to me?"

For Lion had suddenly clapped his hands on her shoulders, and was giving her a combined hug and shake, thoroughly "leonine" in character; but which might have been deleterious to women less firmly built than handsome, upright Mrs. Ashleigh. It did send her crewel-work flying on to the floor.

"Mother," he said heartily, "you're the greatest brick in the universe and I'm the biggest owl. As if you would have waited for proofs! I might have known you better. Why didn't you box my ears?"

"Probably to save myself from absolute extermination. I've come rather near it as it is; but I own I don't deserve to be ordered about as if I was Mrs. de Boonyen or Jowl himself," said Mrs. Ashleigh, laughing, though her mouth was rather unsteady. The next moment she broke down altogether, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"My dear," she said brokenly, "I shall never forgive myself for not having gone there sooner. Poor little Sybil! Poor child! Lion, I am glad of what you told



me, about your feelings towards her the other day, for it enables me to speak more frankly to you now. I could not do so to Jenny, with those big eyes of hers fixed on her sister as though her own life depended on her, and yet unable to see——”

“See what?” asked Lion. He felt sobered, awe-struck, and a little frightened, and the joyous colour had faded out of his face.

Mrs. Ashleigh drew it nearer to her own and kissed it as if he were still a child.

“Do you know that I hardly knew her?” she said. “Jenny was out, gone to the chemist’s for something; and when she lifted her poor little face from the pillow—Lion, my dear, I think that girl is dying, and that she knows it. Poor Jenny! What will she do when she has to know it too?”

There was no answer. Lion had turned away, and for a few minutes there was absolute silence in the room, he trying to fight down the suffocating feeling which had risen in his throat at the sound of his mother’s words: she watching him anxiously through her tears and wishing she had not spoken. Had he deceived himself as to his feelings after all? He had said that his love for Sybil Dysart was dead, that he could never care for her again as he had done; but what save love would have toiled so ardently to clear her name; and now that he had succeeded, now——

“Mother,” he said, facing round on her suddenly, his face quite haggard and colourless, his eyes, so shining a moment back, dim and contracted, “what makes you say that? Is it because she looks ill? But she has been ailing some time. Jenny said so. It mayn’t be anything serious. Perhaps her altered manner made you——”

“Her altered manner?” interrupted Mrs. Ashleigh, smiling sadly. “There was no alteration there. Sybil isn’t a bit like Jenny. She doesn’t know what pride or resentment means. When I came into the room she started up and said ‘Mrs. Ashleigh!’ blushing like a child that has been naughty and hid itself. I said: ‘Yes, my dear; I have come to see you and make

friends again. Will you forgive me for being so hard?’ and she just threw her wasted arms round my neck, clinging to me, and putting up her mouth to be kissed as if I had been her mother. Then that dreadful cough came on, and when Jenny returned about ten minutes later, she first glared at me as if I was murdering her sister, and then flew to Sybil, took her in her arms, and looking at me over her head, said: ‘Mrs. Ashleigh, you have not been telling her of those falsehoods?’ Poor Sybil said: ‘What falsehoods, Jenny?’ and I suppose that answered her, for the child’s face flushed up and quivered all over; but even then I don’t think she would have let me kiss her if I hadn’t first told her that I believed now all she said to me on the day we parted. After that, of course, we did as women usually do—cried, and made fools of ourselves generally; but Sybil—Lion, anyone would have cried over her. It was like looking at her ghost.”

“Has she no doctor?” said Lion in a choked voice. “Surely he would know——”

“Some second-rate practitioner at Esher. He pooh-poohed it at first, the landlady told me, but just of late even he seems to have got frightened, and has been coming every other day. Sybil complained of it. She said they couldn’t afford constant five shillings now for nothing, and she should get well just as soon without him.”

“She ought to have the very best advice there is.”

“So I think; but it is a little difficult, for both are proud on the subject of money, and from us in particular. Lion, I’ll tell you what: couldn’t we get Dr. Hamilton to see her? You know the man I mean—the one who is so great on chest and throat cases, consulting physician at St. Barnard’s Hospital. Your aunt Margaret sent for him once. He lives at Surbiton, close by the girls.”

But Lion did not hear her. He had sat down and buried his face in his hands. Sybil dying—dying! His one love—his, so short a time ago; and but now they two had been laughing and joking! It could not be true.

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